

IN THE ABSTRACT:

Please replace the Abstract with the rewritten Abstract attached hereto on a separate sheet of paper.

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 7 and 8 without prejudice or disclaimer to the subject matter recited therein.

Please amend the following claims:

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1. (Twice Amended) A method for inhibiting the degradation of mammalian natriuretic peptides in a specimen, comprising:

placing the specimen into a container, wherein the face coming into contact with the specimen is made of or coated with a material,

wherein said material inhibits the activation of a substance, which substance if not activated, cannot degrade the mammalian natriuretic peptides.

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3. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein said specimen is obtained from a human, dog, pig, rat or mouse.

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4. (Twice Amended) The method as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein said natriuretic peptide is brain natriuretic peptide (BNP).

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6. (Amended) A method for measuring mammalian natriuretic peptides in a specimen, comprising the steps of:

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employing a container, upon handling the specimen, comprising a material, wherein said material inhibits the activation of a substance, which substance if not activated, cannot degrade the mammalian natriuretic peptides; and

measuring the mammalian natriuretic peptides by standard means.